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ABSTRACT

This document is a brief analysis of survey information received from 33 states and non-state jurisdictions regarding implementation of the new provision in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that all students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum by requiring linkage of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) with the general education curriculum. The survey responses indicate that there are at least five policy and implementation issues related to IEP linkages with the general education curriculum. These issues include: (1) benefits of the IEP/general education curriculum linkages, including the opportunity to develop a common vocabulary and greater collaboration between general and special education teachers, greater opportunities to assure special and general education program continuity from year to year, and the promotion of additional inclusive school practices; (2) the need for linkages to standards and documentation; (3) the need for accommodations and adaptations; (4) the need for knowledge and skill building and professional development to ensure that special education teachers are knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and (5) the need to develop and implement statewide assessment programs for all students. Examples of specific state strategies for addressing these issues are provided. (CR)

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ED 428 489

PROJECT FORUM

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION INCORPORATED

QUICK TURN AROUND – QTA

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF A CRITICAL ISSUE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

ISSUE: LINKAGE OF THE IEP TO THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

FEBRUARY 1999

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Quick Turn Around Forum

QTA - a brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

Issue: Linkage of the IEP to the General Education Curriculum

Date: February 1999

Purpose of this QTA

This QTA is a brief analysis of survey information received from 33 states and non-state jurisdictions regarding implementation of one of the new mandates in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that all students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum. This requires linkage of the individualized education program (IEP) with the general education curriculum.

Background

The 1997 Amendments to IDEA contain several provisions that link the IEP to the general education curriculum. It was the intent of Congress that State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have high expectations for students with disabilities by ensuring access to the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible. Specifically, the IDEA Amendments mandate that the IEP include a statement of the child's present levels of educational performance, including how the child's disability affects involvement in the general curriculum; and for preschool children, how the disability affects participation in appropriate activities. [Section 614(d)(l)(A)(i) (I and II]

The IEP must also include a statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, which enable the child to be involved and progress in the general curriculum; and meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability. [Section 614(d)(l)(A)(ii)(I) and (II)]

The 1997 Amendments to IDEA reflect Congressional intent, as stated in House and Senate Reports, that special education is not a place to which students are sent. Rather, special education is a set of supports that assist students with disabilities to benefit from and progress in the general curriculum.

Methodology

As part of Project FORUM's work on its cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), all state and non-state jurisdiction directors/administrators of special education were asked to complete an open-ended survey during July and August 1998. Information was requested in the following three areas:

- Issues and challenges in implementing IEP/general education curriculum linkages
- Policies and procedures to implement IDEA changes
- Training and technical assistance materials developed to assist LEAs in implementation of IDEA changes

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Survey Results

Survey responses were received from 33 states and non-state jurisdictions (hereafter referred to as SEAs). In addition, several states submitted policy, training, and other related guidance documents. A review of the survey responses indicates that there are at least five policy and implementation issues related to IEP linkages with the general education curriculum. These issues are discussed below.

Benefits of IEP/General Education Curriculum Linkages

Survey respondents reported that benefits of expanded IEP/general education curriculum linkages include the opportunity to develop a common vocabulary and greater collaboration between general and special education teachers.

As increased IEP/general education curriculum linkages are implemented, there will be greater opportunities to assure special and general education program continuity from year to year, as well as a long-range vision (e.g., graduation and transition to post school experiences). Expanded IEP linkages with the general curriculum also promote additional inclusive school practices.

SEA examples include:

- Respondents from Louisiana, Montana, Wyoming, and Illinois indicated that the 1997 Amendments will further expand inclusive school practices within their states.
- American Samoa has developed policy and practice that emphasize team teaching in the general education classroom using the standard curriculum in grades K-3. In the upper grades, teachers modify the standard curriculum and use remedial techniques. At all grade levels, IEPs reflect the general education curriculum.
- In order to have a long-range transition focus for students with disabilities, the Alabama SEA has developed an alternate *Occupational Diploma* option with curriculum content aligned to the general curriculum.

Linkages to Standards and Documentation

The majority of the responding SEAs have defined general education standards and revised their policies regarding IEP development to require linkages with the general education curriculum.

Respondents identified two approaches that link IEPs to standards. First, a standards-based approach that begins with state standards and incorporates into the IEP goals, objectives and strategies to meet those standards. The second approach is a standards-referenced approach, where applicable state or district standards are only referenced. In the latter case, the IEP team begins by identifying a student's unique needs and challenges; then defines the content, instruction, and assessments to meet those needs; and finally, references the educational standards to which these relate.

In the past, many IEPs have been focused on the reading and math curriculum areas. Respondents indicated that SEAs will need to make decisions regarding the extent to which the IEP should be linked to all of the general education curriculum content areas. As the IEP becomes more closely linked with the general curriculum, it will be important not to view special education as merely academic tutoring. IEP teams must continue to consider the specific implications of the student's disability or disabilities.

Survey respondents also reported that SEAs will need to develop guidelines for documentation of the IEP/general education linkages. For example, several respondents reported that IEPs may need narrative content, rather than checklists, to show how general education learning standards and content objectives are linked.

Respondents indicated that standards and benchmarks developed by SEAs may be too broad and may need to be broken down into IEP objectives. Also, guidelines will be needed for grading progress of students with disabilities within the general education curriculum.

SEA examples include:

- In Indiana, each annual IEP goal must indicate the type of curriculum to be provided (e.g., preschool or age-relevant developmental ability or milestone), and the general education curriculum area addressed in that goal. The student's specific need(s) to be addressed by each IEP goal are written on individual goal sheets.
- The Louisiana SEA is implementing specific strategies to replace a previous two-tiered system for students with more significant disabilities that has not addressed general education, but rather an alternative curriculum. Access to the general education curriculum is now required for all students with disabilities.
- The Colorado SEA has developed a process that re-focuses the entire IEP around state content standards with access skills to achieve these standards. The IEP includes only prioritized instruction and focuses on standards and related skills that the IEP team has determined to be critical for long-range student success. Other standards are taught as part of the general curriculum, but not included within the IEP.
- The Maine SEA has also developed a decision-making planning process (i.e., *Learning Results Framework*) that is utilized within the IEP process to personalize instruction and link IEP content to standards and the general education curriculum.

Accommodations and Adaptations

SEA respondents reported that their IEP forms already provide a place to document the accommodations and adaptations related to student needs within the general education curriculum.

Several survey respondents indicated that the IDEA term "specially-designed instruction" will need to be re-defined as general and special education become more coordinated and integrated. Differentiation may be needed between "typical" instructional modifications that should be provided within general education, and those that are truly specially-designed instruction (i.e., special education and related services).

SEA staff indicated that support is needed for teachers and parents in understanding how standards and curriculum frameworks, with appropriate accommodations and adaptations, encompass the diversity of skill levels and learning styles of students with disabilities, especially those with cognitive challenges.

SEA examples include:

- The *Illinois Learning Standards* include an appendix of guidelines for modifying and adapting curriculum and instruction to use in IEP meetings.

- The Kansas SEA has developed a student-centered IEP process that includes identification of accommodations or modifications to support students in the general curriculum.

Knowledge and Skill Building Through Professional Development

A number of respondents indicated that there is a need for expanded pre- and in-service training and professional development to ensure that special education teachers are knowledgeable about the general education curriculum, especially teachers of students who have low incidence disabilities and those who teach multiple grade levels.

Expanded pre- and in-service training is also needed for *both* general and special education teachers in such areas as:

- How standards within curriculum frameworks encompass the diversity of skill levels and learning styles of students with disabilities
- Instructional strategies to enhance general education curriculum participation by students with disabilities
- The breadth of curricular areas with which the IEP may need to be linked (especially at the secondary level)
- Co-teaching strategies
- Collaboration strategies

Because the above training should be ongoing, adequate time is needed to support mentoring, coaching, and opportunities to practice collaboration and new skills.

Survey respondents also identified the need for training of IEP teams in the development of IEP goals and objectives linked to state and district assessments, state standards, and the general education curriculum.

Finally, survey respondents indicated that the broader school community needs to be informed of IEP linkages to the general education curriculum.

SEA examples include:

- The Louisiana SEA has developed a draft *General Education Access Guide: A Tool Kit for Program Development* which is being field tested.
- The New York SEA has a *Checklist for Implementation of IEP Requirements* and *Questions and Answers Related to the IEP Development and Considerations* to help clarify IDEA requirements related to linkages of IEPs with the general education curriculum.
- The Arizona SEA has developed a technical assistance document, *Connecting Components of the Individualized Educational Program.*
- The California SEA has offered IEP training courses on the Internet and developed IEP fact sheets on the Department of Education's website.
- The Michigan SEA has awarded mini-grants, using comprehensive system of personnel development (CSPD) funds, to schools working on projects that assist in adapting/modifying general education curriculum. Mini-grants have supported release time for teachers to plan for instruction, initiate professional development curriculum, and purchase curricular materials.
- The Rhode Island SEA has funded an IEP Resource and Technical Assistance Center to provide needed IEP training and support in the LEAs.

Assessment

Many SEAs have defined state curriculum frameworks and implemented statewide assessment programs for all students. Several

respondents reported that special educators are involved in task forces and committee work to develop curriculum and assessments. SEAs are beginning to integrate curriculum frameworks, benchmarks, and alternative assessment into the IEP process.

SEA respondents indicated that the use of performance assessment to monitor progress in the general education curriculum should be emphasized as an alternative to standardized measures that are not appropriate for students with some disabilities. Respondents also noted that technically-sound rubrics are not available for pinpointing student progress in relation to the state and local curriculum. Commercial tests will need to be supplemented by curriculum-based assessment since there are no thorough and sound tools to make judgements about how a student is progressing in the general education curriculum. Individual criterion-referenced diagnostic tools will need to be developed for all aspects of the curriculum.

SEA examples include:

- The Colorado SEA has developed generic levels of proficiency (e.g., *unsatisfactory, not yet proficient, proficient, and advanced*) that are used to indicate progress toward meeting IEP goals and objectives. These may also be used for reporting progress to parents or for other accountability purposes.

- The Michigan SEA has initiated a pilot that aligns the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) with an alternate assessment for students with disabilities referred to as, *Assessment for Unique Education Needs*.

Conclusion

All responding states and non-state jurisdictions have embarked on the process of linking the IEP to the general education curriculum through policy revision and/or professional development opportunities. Several respondents indicated that they have re-tooled their IEP process to fully embrace the intent of the 1997 Amendments to IDEA.

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